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HART, Nancy. *Few West Virginians were aware that they had a famous spy as a native until Leslie's Weekly for May 26, 1910 carried the story of a part she played in the Civil War. The story was by Marion H. Kerner, a Civil War telegrapher, who had reasons to remember Nancy because it was because of her that he spent time in a Confederate prison. This is the story that alerted West Virginians to the fact that there had been a spy in their midst, but it was too late for recognition because by then Nancy had been in her grave on Mannings Knob eight years.*

After the battle of Ball's Bluff, in October, 1861, I was

transferred to Gauley Bridge. After a short stay there I was ordered to proceed to Summersville, W. Va. On leaving Gauley Bridge, one of my comrades, Isaiah D. Maize (now living in Philadelphia), remarked to me, "You will come back by way of the South." He was a true prophet, as will now be explained.

After a tedious and perilous ride over rugged and uncertain paths, we emerged from the density of the mountain forest into the more cheerful and inspiring sunlight which greeted us as we turned our horses' heads toward Summersville, on the broad Clarksburg turnpike. I reported to Lieutenant-Colonel

William C. Starr, who commanded the detachment of about sixty effective men of the Ninth West Virginia Regiment stationed at this post, the main body of which I had left at Gauley Bridge. Colonel Starr's headquarters was in a pretty, two-story and attic frame dwelling, which had been hastily abandoned by its occupants upon the approach of the "Yankee troops." All the comforts of a happy country home were in evidence here. The parlor furniture was plain, but comfortable; the walls were adorned with engravings and colored prints or chromos indicative of the artistic taste of the family; the dining-room, kitchen and bedrooms were well equipped. The large front room on the second floor, which formerly had contained a double bed, was now furnished with four single cots, which were used by Colonel Starr, Captain Davis, Lieutenant Stivers and myself. The double bed had been relegated to one of the two attic rooms, for whatever emergency might arise. It was unexpected when it did arise.

The little garden back of the house had been stripped of all vegetation, so it became necessary for us to resort to a little foraging for whatever fresh vegetables our appetites might crave. One warm July day, in 1862, a foraging party, made up of Colonel Starr, Captain Davis, two orderlies and myself, started out in search of such table luxuries as our garden had ceased to supply. We had been out about three hours when smoke was discovered ascending from the valley below, indicating a habitation. In the direction of the smoke we guided our horses, and soon came to a log cabin, in front of which were two mountain maidens busily engaged in crushing corn between two big

bowlders which had been fashioned for that purpose. When they saw us approaching, they ran into the cabin and barred the heavy wooden door after them. Nearing the cabin, we saw the face of an old woman peering through the little hinged window on one side of the door, and heard her exclaim to the girls, "The Yankees are upon us!" Lieutenant-Colonel Starr dismounted from his horse and gently knocked upon the door, but receiving no response, he knocked more vigorously. After several vain attempts he went to the window, and assuring the old lady that our mission was a friendly one, she was persuaded to exchange some of her garden truck for the liberal supply of salt we offered. This important commodity was scarce and very expensive in this region, as well as all over the South.

When our sacks were filled, we were about to remount our horses and return to Summersville, when Lieutenant-Colonel Starr drew from his pocket a description of a young girl, named Nancy Hart, a rebel guide, for whose capture the government had offered a liberal reward. He handed the paper to Captain Davis, and after a brief consultation the two returned to the cabin and, dismounting, approached the young girls, who had resumed their corn crushing. Lieutenant-Colonel Starr laid his hand gently upon the shoulders of one of the girls and said, "Well, Nancy, at last we've got you!" "My God!" she exclaimed, "I am not Nancy Hart! What are you going to do with me?" With this unconscious confession from the girl's own lips, there was no further hesitation. She and her companion were taken to Summersville and incarcerated in a dilapidated old building which had formerly served as the jail. Escape would have been easy for

these nymphs of the mountains but for the vigilance of the guards, who constantly patrolled the building on every side.

The personal comfort of prisoners of war was not a subject for serious consideration in those turbulent times, a place in which to secure them being more important. But here were two young women, untutored and uncultured, it is true, but still they were women, and their condition in this miserable old building excited my sympathy. I thought of the vacant attic in our headquarters, and appealed to Colonel Starr to transfer his prisoners to this more comfortable abode. After much persuasion the colonel consented, and the transfer was duly made. To while away the dreary hours of their imprisonment, I supplied them with sewing material and illustrated papers, which they could not read, but they eagerly studied the pictures. They were also furnished with such dainties as the sutler's wagon afforded, and I did what I could to allay their fears.

One day an itinerant ambrotypist came along, and by permission of the colonel I escorted Nancy out to the wagon under guard to have her picture taken. She had never seen a camera before, and became very much excited when asked to sit before the instrument, which the operator had focused upon a vacant camp stool. She was assured of its harmlessness only after my picture was taken. Then decorating my hat with a military feather, it was placed upon Nancy's head, and she was greatly elated when the operator showed her the portrait. The picture was framed in a little case bearing the American eagle and United States flag as adornments on the back. One of these copies is still in my



MARION H. KERNER

The United States military telegraph operator who was befriended by Nancy Hart until he double-crossed her.

possession and is reproduced (herewith).

During the day the door of the room occupied by the girls was kept open, so that the guard patrolling in front might keep an eye on his charges. No restriction was placed upon conversation with the girls, but the guards were not allowed to enter the room. Nevertheless, Nancy managed to win the confidence of one of them so far as to secure his musket, probably in order to convince him that she could shoulder it as well as she had ever shouldered her rifle, with which, she said, her skill had enabled her to furnish the home with all sorts of game, large and small, that abounded in the mountains. No sooner had she grasped the musket in her hands, however, than she stepped back in the room, and lifting it to her shoulder, fired. Her guard fell dead at his post, and Nancy, jumping over his body, rushed downstairs and out to the barn,



NANCY HART ESCAPING. A drawing by Millie Anderson for a C & P Telephone Company series of historical sketches used as mailing pieces.

where she mounted Colonel Starr's horse, and, without saddle or bridle, fled away before the sleeping officials could possibly realize what had happened. This was about four o'clock in the morning. The next thing we heard was the alarm from the outposts, but Nancy had escaped, leaving her unfortunate companion behind, who related to us the circumstances of the shooting of the guard just as she had witnessed it with her own astonished eyes.

Men were immediately sent in pursuit, the little cabin at the foot of the mountain was closely watched, the mountains were scoured in every direction, but no sign of Nancy, until one morning, a week later, she appeared at the head of a battalion of Jackson's cavalry, five hundred strong, under command of Major Bailey, who surrounded our headquarters

and without much resistance captured the entire force, including one Dr. Rucker, for whom the Confederates had long been looking and whom they were anxious to capture on account of his Union proclivities. Even the men at the outposts were dragged into the net and lined up in front of headquarters for the march to Dixie. Nancy had not forgotten the little favors which had shortened the hours of her captivity, so when she saw me in the line of prisoners she hastened to Major Bailey and told him that I was not a Yankee, but that I, too, was a prisoner, and he ought to let me go. With this assurance from the girl, he allowed me to enter the house to get my effects.

My first thought upon entering the office was to secure the main line sounder, an important telegraph instrument, which was still in place. This I did, and

placing it under an army blanket which I threw over my arm, made my way down the turnpike in the direction of Gauley Bridge. I had proceeded about a mile when I came to the place where the wire had been cut by the enemy to prevent communication with the main body of the regiment. Placing my instrument in circuit and grounding the Summersville side, I found the wire "O. K." to Gauley Bridge.

While in the act of reporting the capture, I was surprised by half a dozen mounted men, who approached with carbines leveled at me and ordered me to desist. I promptly obeyed the order, and likewise accepted without hesitation their pressing invitation to join them in a little excursion back to Summersville. When the case was reported to Major Bailey, he flew into a rage and with an oath threatened to "shoot the little Yankee traitor." But Nancy again came to my rescue. What she told the major I never knew, but he put me under guard, and, as my comrade at Gauley Bridge had predicted, my face was turned toward the South.

We marched over those rough mountain paths all day and until long after sundown before we reached a spot where it was safe to rest for the night. This was in an open piece of ground on the mountainside far away from the turnpike, which our escort avoided for fear of being overtaken by our troops. Several of our soldiers were without substantial footgear, and they suffered with sore feet until we were finally unfit to march. Then we were mounted on horses and the former riders walked until we reached the pike again. The horse I rode was without saddle and there were no stirrups. I suffered worse torment than when walking, for the blood rushed to

my hanging feet and they felt as if they were being held down by heavy weights. Fortunately, however, a country wagon was impressed into service, and the invalids were tumbled into it and we rode the remainder of the way to White Sulphur Springs.

General Loring was in command here, and after securing Dr. Rucker in irons and feeding the prisoners they marched us to Christianburg, where we were hustled into a cattle train and sent to Lynchburg fair grounds. Here I met Frank Lamb, Frank Drummond, Charlie Moore and Henry Buell, members of the United States Military Telegraph Corps, who had been captured previously. From Lynchburg we were sent, on August 11th, to Belle Isle and thence to Libby Prison, where we remained until paroled on September 14th, 1862. Frank Drummond's prison diary of August 31st, 1862, records that the street guards had orders to shoot any prisoner whose head appeared flush with the window. One of the operators forgot himself one day and leaned out to view the James River. He drew back as he saw the guard raise his gun. When the shot was fired, we heard a commotion above us and later learned that the ball had passed through our ceiling and killed a sergeant who was sitting on a table in the room above, four or five feet from the window.

One day an official of the prison came into our room and called out Frank Lamb, Frank Drummond, Henry Buell, Marion Kerner. He escorted us to the office, where we were confronted by General Winder. The official who had taken us into the office avoided my inquiry as to why we were called, but intimated something about hostages for a Confederate telegrapher who had

been convicted of being a spy, and that we might be subjected to whatever punishment the "Yankee government" imposed upon him, and meantime would be held as hostages pending negotiations. At last a broad official form was produced, containing our descriptions and an obligation for our signature under oath. "This," said Winder, "is a parole; sign it and prepare to return to your homes." After each had signed his name, it suddenly flashed upon us that Charlie Moore was not there. We could not leave our comrade behind. A search of the record disclosed the fact that his name had been inadvertently omitted. After some delay the official departed to bring Moore.

Returning to our ward we packed up our belongings and took passage on a wagon to the James River, where the United States steamer *New York* was waiting to take aboard the exchanged and paroled prisoners. We made no landings until we reached Annapolis, where we were put ashore and left to shift for ourselves. Our first thought was of the telegraph office and a message to the War Department announcing our arrival and destitute condition. Arrangements for our transportation reached us with orders to report at the War Department. We were a sorry looking lot of tramps. Not one of the party cared to present himself until divested of his veteran costume which had been worn during imprisonment. There was no way to overcome our modesty but to raise money by hook or crook.

After a long discussion as to ways and means, one of the prodigals volunteered to go to General Anson Stager, general superintendent of military telegraphs. Putting on his happiest expression, he boldly entered

General Stager's office and cautioned him to stand aloof while he told the story which brought forth enough cash for our immediate necessities. "Come in to-morrow when you get cleaned up," said the general. The "volunteer's return" brought joy to the hearts of the other four despondent knights of the key.

We purchased new outfits at the store of Saks & Co., on Seventh Street. We made quite a respectable appearance the following day when we entered the office of General Stager, and the greeting we received was most fraternal and hearty. The stories of our capture and imprisonment were told by each one in detail, and we were provided with railroad passes to our respective homes, where anxious hearts were awaiting our return.

Nancy Hart, the prime cause of my prison experience, was never seen again by me, and she has probably passed away long ago.

Note: Miss Gladys Vaughan of Kesslers Cross Lanes supplied the Leslie's clipping for this work. To set history right, she added some facts about Nancy Hart's life. After the war she married Joshua Douglass and bore him two sons, George and Kennos. Nancy's last public appearance was shortly before her death, and at the court house in Lewisburg to testify in behalf of Kennos who was charged with the killing of Tom Reed at a dance in Trout Valley. Dr. William P. Rucker, a brilliant lawyer and physician who lived near Kesslers Cross Lanes in the bend of the Gauley River, known for years as the Rucker Bend, defended Kennos.

Nancy Hart is buried on Mannings Knob in Greenbrier County. Her grave is in the cemetery where the Mannings family buried their slaves. At the